

Cathedrals have rich histories

By Linda Laws
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A significant and rare event will take place in Bury St. Edmunds next week, but this event will probably go unnoticed by most of the local population. What is even more unusual is that RAF Lakenheath will play a part in this event. So, what is it that is so special?

Each year, a conference of deans and provosts takes place in one of the 42 cathedrals of England, and this year it will be held in the diocese of St. Edmundsbury and Ipswich. The meetings will take place in Bury St. Edmunds.

The role of deans and provosts is rather like that of the managing director or chief executive officer of an organisation: as well as being ordained church members, they are also administrators and deal with the day-to-day running of their cathedral. Where the cathedral was once a parish church, as in the case of St. Edmundsbury, a provost is usually in place rather than a dean.

Lakenheath's part will be to sponsor a number of the participants of the conference on the base, giving a base tour followed by dinner at the officers' club Monday evening.

Of the 42 cathedrals in England, East Anglia has its share. The nearest to the base is Ely, and further afield are the cathedrals of Norwich and Peterborough. Some cathedrals are more well-known than others, and some are relatively modern, such as Bury St. Edmunds'.

St. Edmundsbury Cathedral

The church of St. James became a cathedral in 1914 when the diocese of St. Edmundsbury and Ipswich was created. The cathedral became known as St. Edmundsbury Cathedral. At the beginning of this century, the eastern part of the county was in the diocese of Norwich, while the west was in the diocese of Ely. As long ago as 1070, there had been attempts to establish a cathedral on the site, initially thwarted by fierce opposition at the time from the monks who had their own church on the site.

Unlike many cathedrals of England, on entering St. Edmundsbury cathedral you have the impression of space and light, and you will

also notice that it is not as large as other cathedrals. It is a very light building and colourful painting is one of its features. Look, for example, at the painted hammer beam roof of the nave, the main part of the church. This painting was completed as recently as 1982. The nave itself was started in 1503.

Ely Cathedral

This cathedral is considered one of the grandest of England's surviving Norman churches. The Norman cathedral was built between 1083 and 1130. Probably the most famous feature of Ely Cathedral is the Octagon. The Octagon replaced the central tower which collapsed in 1322. The collapse is not surprising since Ely Cathedral is built on land which was once covered in water – indeed the cathedral used to be on an island.

Like St. Edmundsbury, the current cathedral was built on the site of an ancient monastery. The bishopric was founded in 1109.

Ely Cathedral and RAF Lakenheath have a close association – it is the venue used by the high school for their graduation ceremony, and for several years has held the Thanksgiving service. Old churches and cathedrals can be very cold this time of year and if you intend to participate, you might like to think about warm clothing.

Canterbury Cathedral

You will pass close to Canterbury Cathedral if you travel to the continent by ferry from Dover, for the cathedral is located off the A2 in Kent.

Canterbury Cathedral is the administrative centre of the Church of England, and its archbishop is Primate of All England. The position is currently held by Dr. George Carey. The cathedral has been the seat of an archbishopric since it was founded in 597, the year that St. Augustine – the first archbishop – was sent from Rome to convert the Anglo-Saxons to Christianity.

The most famous occurrence in this place of worship was the murder of Thomas à Becket inside the cathedral in 1170, a terrible deed ordered by Henry II. Though the shrine, which had become a place of pilgrimage in the Middle Ages, was destroyed on the orders of Henry VIII, the spot Becket was murdered is marked by a plaque.

St. Paul's Cathedral

The dome of St. Paul's has to be one of the



St. Edmundsbury Cathedral

most familiar of London's sights, and even if you have not visited it, is likely to be recognisable in tourist literature. There has been a cathedral on this site for 1,400 years, the first Saxon cathedral being built in 1090. This was re-built following a fire in 1136. The Great Fire of London in 1666 reduced the cathedral to a ruin. Sir Christopher Wren, one of England's most distinguished architects, was commissioned to re-build St. Paul's in 1668.

In addition to its other fine features, one of the popular areas for visitors to explore is the whispering gallery, which is reached from a very long set of winding stairs.

Here I have mentioned just a few of the great cathedrals of England but you will find plenty to discover if you visit any of the 42.

Linda's tip

This weekend, the world-famous Grand National horse race meeting takes place at Aintree Racecourse, Liverpool, Merseyside. The event takes place over three days and ends Saturday, but the main race is at 3:45 p.m. Saturday. There will be extensive television coverage, and a tradition in this country is for people in their work groups to establish a sweepstake – names of runners can be obtained from newspapers. For more information, call (0151) 523 2600.



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